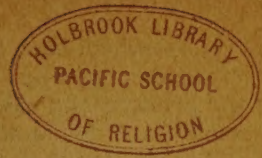


The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM



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DEAR MEMBER,

A letter from a reliable source on the Continent gives information about conditions in France. The writer has in mind primarily the Protestant Churches.

UNOCCUPIED FRANCE

"France is to-day a divided country. Divisions go perhaps deeper than at any time in French history. Unfortunately it is impossible to have them discussed openly, and so a psychological situation is created in which there is much bitterness and also much revolutionary sentiment. There are few out-and-out collaborators and these are found mainly among the opportunist type of politician and among the middle classes. The working classes on the whole and the intellectuals seem to be anti-collaborationist. The difficulty is that discussions on this point never lead to clear conclusions since the idea of collaboration is understood in many different ways.

"The divisions in the country affect church life very deeply. There are those in the Church who take the national revolution seriously, see in it the beginning of a real moral reconstruction of the country, and are disposed therefore to collaborate closely with the Government. But there are also those who believe that the Government is so compromised, that the national revolution is so much a matter of empty slogans, and that the semi-totalitarian policies in the realm of national organisation are so dangerous, that the Church should in no way be mixed up with the present regime. The opposition between these various groups has become a grave problem in many local situations."

Difficulties arise in connection with services of worship officially arranged by the Government which seem to commit the Church to an endorsement of its policy ; in the matter of the oath of unconditional allegiance which all officials have to take ; and in regard to anti-semitic legislation which is being pressed forward by some of the leaders in Vichy, but is meeting with strong opposition in which the Protestant Churches have taken a leading part.

The policy of the Roman Catholic Bishops in France is definitely anti-totalitarian as was made clear, though guardedly, in a pastoral letter issued in July. None of the members of the regular episcopate is in favour of unreserved collaboration in the new order.

THE CHURCH IN GERMANY

While the war against Russia is represented in Germany as a crusade—it was described by one of the Gauleiters as "a struggle against the anti-Christ of Moscow"—the persecution of the Church is intensified. The same people who use the slogans of a crusade are responsible for the persecution and for the propagation of a new German religion. A pamphlet has been widely circulated throughout Germany which, while not openly sponsored by the National Socialist Party, emanates from official circles. Summaries of this have appeared in the British press. The pamphlet anticipates the coming of a National Reich Church which will absorb all existing Churches and will serve the sole purposes of *Volk* and race. Other Churches and religious bodies, particu-

larly those which have an international character, must not be tolerated in Germany. The immediate confiscation by the State of the property of other Churches and the prohibition of the printing and sale of the Bible and of the importation of Bibles or other Christian literature are demanded.

The resistance of the Churches, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, is stiffening. After a period of comparative silence voices are again heard in both confessions that recall some of the prophetic utterances of the early stage of the Church conflict.

The same contradictions in the Nazi attitude to Christianity which are manifest in Germany appear also in occupied Russia. It is reported from sources in touch with the Church in Germany that army chaplains have been allowed to re-open cathedrals and hold services in them. The cathedrals of Borossovo and Smolensk were given back to the people for religious use. When the reopening of the cathedrals was announced many of the inhabitants of all classes and ages set themselves spontaneously to clean them, decorate them and replace the ikons. Large audiences, including many German soldiers, attended the services of consecration. Towards the end of one of the services an aged Russian began to sing the liturgical portions of the Russian Orthodox service, which was taken up by the congregation, and the liturgy was sung for the first time for nearly a quarter of a century. German officers report that the question frequently put to them by Russians is, "What is your attitude to Christianity?"

Rosenberg, on the other hand, is trying to prevent any restoration of Church life in Russia. In this he is said to be opposed by the S.S. which, while definitely anti-Christian in Germany, seems to want to encourage religion in Russia. It was under the auspices and in the presence of S.S. leaders that the Orthodox Synod in the Ukraine held its first meeting. The contradiction may be explained by the remark of one of these leaders that, while religion ought to be done away with among the progressive German people, it is still necessary for the primitive Russians.

The persecution of the Jews has reached a new acute stage. In October 15,000 Jews from Berlin and 10,000 from other centres, were deported to Poland. Among the people, on the other hand, there are signs of growing sympathy with the Jews in having to bear the stigma of the Jewish star, and in some of the Protestant Churches Christian Jews wearing their stars take part regularly in the Communion services.

THE UNION OF CHURCHES IN JAPAN

Accounts have already been given in the News-Letter (C.N-L. Nos. 60 and 83) of the movement for the union of the Churches of different denominations in Japan. The formal constitution of the new united Church, to be called "The Church of Christ in Japan," took place at a conference last June. It was attended by 320 delegates representing 34 different denominations, including all the Christian bodies excepting the Roman Catholics, Orthodox and Anglicans. The creed which the Church has adopted has its basis as follows :—

"This Church accepts the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as its basic standard of faith and conduct.

"In conformity with the Apostles' Creed and in harmony with the confessions of faith of the uniting Churches, we designate the following as the prime essentials :

"The Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as revealed in the sacred Scriptures, forgives sin, justifies, sanctifies, and endows with eternal life all who believe in the atonement of Christ, the Son, who died for the sins of the world and rose again.

"The Church is the body in which those who have been called by grace worship, observe the sacred ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, proclaim the gospel and in hope wait for the coming of the Lord."

By a recent law all Churches in Japan must be "approved" by the government, and no information is as yet available whether the creed and form of organisation of the new Church have met with this approval.

SOME BENEFICIAL EFFECTS OF EVACUATION

A recent report to the Education Committee of the London County Council by its Chief Inspector on the subject of Religious Education has deservedly attracted attention. The report contains some interesting facts about the beneficial effects of evacuation on the religious life of the schools.

"There is evidence of increased church and Sunday school attendance by London children in reception areas. This is general throughout all reception areas, but particularly so in South Wales. From figures obtained from a very large number of schools it is estimated that about 80 per cent. of London school children now in reception areas attend church or Sunday school regularly. In some cases schools report regular attendances of 90 per cent. and even 100 per cent. Of those who are attending, roughly about 30 per cent. never attended church or Sunday school before.

"There is no doubt whatever that life in country villages and towns is having some effect on the outlook of many London children and that to some extent, difficult to measure at present, they are being brought under religious influences, either in homes or in churches or in both, which many of them never experienced before. In many areas out-of-school and social activities—clubs, guilds, scouts, guides, etc.—all centre round the church or chapel, and in this way the influence is further reinforced. Senior children attend confirmation classes and are confirmed. There is strong evidence, too, that many of the church choirs in reception areas are being maintained and strongly reinforced by London children."

We are warned at the same time not to attach too much weight to these statistics nor to draw hasty conclusions from them. Not all the children are fortunate in their temporary homes, nor can the efforts of teachers and hosts make up for the loss to the children of the influence of their own parents and homes, where this is of the right kind.

Are we sufficiently alive to the profound effect which their years of sojourn in the country must have on the lives of the next generation, to the greatness of the opportunity and the irreparable loss, if it is missed?

A DECISION FOR THE CHURCH

The letter published six weeks ago (C.N.-L. No. 105) from a layman, giving the reasons why he had decided in middle life to offer himself for ordination, has produced a crop of letters from our members and some public comment. These show how deep is the gulf between those for whom the Church as it exists to-day raises no agonising questions and those for whom it is an acute problem, and how great is the difficulty of mutual understanding. A number of letters are full of gratitude for the letter and say that it expresses what many are thinking. One well-known layman, himself a loyal Churchman, suggested that it should be reprinted for wide circulation, since "this reasoning and argument is the very thing needed by thousands of the very best of our men and women." Other letters from both clergy and laity protest indignantly against the publication of such "splenetic"—as the *Church Times* calls them—strictures on the Church.

The letter, as I explained at the time, was a private one, written with no thought of its wider use. I sought permission to publish it for two reasons. The first is that it is a significant and highly encouraging fact that a man who has wrestled for many years with modern perplexities (as the writer of the letter has done), and has found in the Church much to repel him, should none the less decide to enter its ministry and submit to its discipline. It is "news" in a different sense from the ordination of hundreds for whom to take orders is the natural fulfilment of their upbringing, or involves no acute struggle, or is a decision reached with a less mature experience of life.

The second reason is that the feelings of the writer about the Church to-day do in fact, as our correspondence and much other evidence shows, represent the state of mind, whether right or wrong, of a large number of lay people and of some of the clergy themselves. Nothing is to be gained by covering up that fact because we don't like it. Unless we set ourselves to understand this state of mind and its causes, there is little hope of our being able to bridge the gulf between the Church and those outside.

Generalisations express only one side of the truth. The writer says that the Church of England is in the main a dead Church. But that there is life in the Church, streaming from Christ, he would be the last to deny ; it is the power of that life that draws him to its ministry. That there are in the Church evidences of creative energy, both at home and in its expansion overseas, the pages of the News-Letter bear record. It is no contradiction of this, but a further evidence of vitality, that there should be in the Church rebels against the mediocrity and barrenness of much of its life. The importance of the letter lies in its unequivocal recognition of the extent to which the Church has lost touch with the actual life of men. Those outside the Church know this, and when its members begin to feel it like a wound, forces are at work that can bring about a change. The divorce between religion and real life can be healed only by a capacity (in a degree as yet scarcely dreamt of) on the part of Christians to *learn*—to learn from types of experience different from our own, to learn from our critics, to learn above all, from those who are driven to discard altogether the current forms and moulds of religious experience in order to discover afresh its inner truth and power.

RUSSIA AND RELIGION

One of our members sends the following postscript to what was said a fortnight ago about Russia and Religion :

"I do not question that the facts are as the Christian News-Letter describes them, but if we are to learn from them we must know them in the context of Russian experience. We disagree with Russia's attitude to religion. We must, therefore, try to understand why the Russians have acted as they have, and we must try to discover the relation of the past to their thinking *to-day*. We must be interested in what *they* think the present situation demands of them. British people are incorrigible in their desire to put others right, in spite of the fact that Christianity teaches us to be interested primarily in our own shortcomings, and, because we know this to be true in our own experience, most ready to understand why other men have also failed and made mistakes. If we approached other people's mistakes and other nation's failings in this spirit we should have that quality of understanding, which is in itself redemptive and creative, because it sets people free from the defensive attitude which we are all tempted to adopt when we make mistakes."

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER AS CHRISTMAS GIFT

Orders for a subscription to the Christian News-Letter as a Christmas Gift to friends ought to reach us within the next week, in order that the subscription may start with the issue of December 17th. The Supplement to this issue will deal with a subject central to the faith and thought of the News-Letter and thus be a good introduction to new members.

Yours sincerely,

P. H. Deane

Subscriptions—The rate of subscription to the News-Letter is 12s. 6d. (\$3.0 in U.S.A. and Canada) for one year, and 6s. 6d. (\$1.50 in U.S.A. and Canada) for six months. Back numbers—4d. each, 1s. 2d. for 6, 1s. 11d. for 12 copies. Post free.

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